

LETTERS TO THE NEWS

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Thong Refuted

To the Chairman of the NEWS:

I have just read the article of Huynh Sanh Thong in the 7 February issue of the Yale Daily NEWS entitled "Vietnam Between The Red Devil and The Deep Blue 'C'". This article contains many serious errors and requires refutation which I, as one who has spent the past ten years in Vietnam, am happy to provide.

Mr. Thong gives his faction of the Dai Viet party credit for installing General Nguyen Khanh as Prime Minister. From Paris this group fed Khanh information that the generals then in power were "pro-French neutralists," thus provoking Khanh to overthrow them. However, this "pro-French neutralist" charge has never been proven, and the generals involved were eventually released for lack of evidence. If Mr. Thong is pleased to credit the Southern Dai Viets for installing Khanh, he is hardly justified in blaming Khanh alone for all the subsequent "political instability marked by riots, coups and counter-coups in 1964 and early 1965," especially since the Southern Dai Viets had positions of high official responsibility during part of 1964. Active in their political machinations, they reorganized their faction into a new group called the New Dai Viet Party while their leader, Nguyen Ton Hoan, was still Vice Prime Minister for Pacification, and they proceeded to place their followers in government jobs.

It is not true that Nguyen Cao Ky and Nguyen Van Thieu took over the government from Phan Huy Quat in order to "head off soundings for a (neutralist) settlement" of the war. This takeover came about as the result of a mounting feud between Quat and the Chief of State, Pham Khanh Suu, who, under the pressure of Cochinese politicians including Southern Dai Viets, had been attempting to undermine Quat. Quat asked the generals to resolve the feud, and they went one step further in taking over completely. Quat had made no attempt to sound out negotiations with the Communists and did not advocate a neutralist solution. If there are "reasons to believe that (President Johnson's peace) talks collapsed chiefly because Washington could not in time produce a government in Saigon to the liking of the Communists," those reasons are a mystery to everyone but Mr. Thong, for the US has given every appearance of trying to bolster the government of Prime Minister Ky.

Defends Porter-Lansdale

Mr. Thong claims that Deputy Ambassador William Porter and Senior Liaison Officer Edward Lansdale are masterminding a CIA plot to neutralize South Vietnam, behind the back of Ambassador Lodge but presumably on orders from Washington. He cites at various places in his article the names of fifteen Lansdale supporters who back him up in this plot. This is utter nonsense! If the Administration wanted to neutralize South Vietnam, it would find it much more convenient to say so publicly than to argue with its critics who favor such a solution. If the Porter-Lansdale "plot" is not on orders from Washington, it is inconceivable that they could get very far with it without having some responsible American or Vietnamese official taking notice and complaining. As for the fifteen backers, at least half of them, known to me personally, do not favor a neutralist solution in Vietnam, and I have heard or read nothing about the others to indicate their support of such a solution, including the published works which Mr. Thong cites as supposedly promoting "an ambivalent formula of neo-colonialism and neutralism."

As for Lansdale's having engineered the replacement of General Tran Thien Khiem by Vu Van Thai as Ambassador to the United States, Mr. Thong ignores the fact that this change was proposed by Foreign Minister Tran Van Do long before Lansdale returned to Vietnam. Ambassador Thai's recent public statements certainly do not reveal him to be a "pave." Mr. Thong's antipathy towards Ambassador Thai may be explained by the fact that Thai's predecessor was involved in the several abortive coup attempts in late 1964 and 1965 in which Southern Dai Viet army officers participated.

Mr. Thong's statements and charges cannot be attributed entirely to misinformation, for his wild boasts are too flimsy to be credible. In Vietnam, however, where people are more prone to believe rumor and gossip, it is this kind of preposterous character assassination that has made such a mess of politics. If fewer Vietnamese politicians would consider themselves and their own limited groups as the sole candidates for "a truly national government" but rather join a common effort for a common cause, stable government could be achieved. It is hoped that the true nationalists — those in Vietnam who live with the problems of their country — are making progress towards this end.

C. R. Mellor, 1947